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ABSTRACT

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system provides information to education writers for newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. ERIC can be used to find the names of reliable sources in a given field, as well as background information for an in-depth article or broadcast. The ERIC collection of documents on microfiche is housed at 650 public institutions, some of which also provide computer searches of the data base for a fee of approximately 15 to 25 dollars. The Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors suggests the appropriate subject terms for an ERIC search. The computer search results in a printout of abstracts and bibliographic citations; these are scanned in order to decide which microfiche, photocopies, or journals to request. Two printed indexes also provide bibliographic citations and abstracts, and are indexed by ERIC descriptors: (1) Resources in Education (RIE)--listing research reports, project summaries, and conference papers that are available as part of the ERIC microfiche collection; and (2) Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE)--which indexes articles from education journals. ERIC does not provide microfiche or photocopies of articles cited in CIJE. A directory of the 16 ERIC clearinghouses, each specializing in a different subject area, is appended.
(Author/GDC)

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INFORMATION
For Education Writers

by Charles H. Harrison

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from ERIC

This publication is a product of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation. It was prepared pursuant to a contract with the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. For information on the Clearinghouse and its activities contact: ERIC/TM, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. Telephone: 609-921-9000.

ERIC Offers Education Writers Background, Quotable Sources

ERIC IS. . .

(A) any person or thing colored red
(B) both the first and last names of Finland's ambassador to Iceland
(C) an acronym meaning the Educational Resources Information Center, a service only to educators and educational institutions and agencies
(D) none of the above

The answer is (D) because it's a trick question. ERIC means the Educational Resources Information Center all right, but it is not a service *only* to educators and educational institutions and agencies. ERIC also is a service to education writers for newspapers, magazines, radio, and television.

ERIC, which is run by the National Institute of Education, is a system for collecting and dispensing information. This information consists primarily of articles published in trade and professional journals as well as unpublished papers and reports (a research paper delivered at a conference or a project summary report issued by a school district, for example).

ERIC can provide valuable background information for the writer working on an in-depth article, series, or special broadcast. But ERIC can also supply writers with the names of persons who are worth contacting and quoting in everything from a breaking news story to a magazine feature.

Education writers can gain access to the information collected by ERIC through its network of 16 clearinghouses and nearly 650 public institutions scattered throughout the 50 states. Each clearinghouse (see list on page 7) specializes in a particular subject, such as early childhood, testing, or urban education. However, each clearinghouse has access to *all* materials stored in the ERIC system.

The 650 public institutions housing the ERIC collection include university and public libraries and some regional and state educational agencies. A complete list of these institutions is available by writing to the ERIC Processing and Reference Facility, 4833 Rugby Avenue, Suite 303, Bethesda, MD 20014. Ask for the *Directory of ERIC Microfiche Collections.*

Do it yourself or let the computer help

Education writers who want to find out what information is available or what authorities might be worth contacting on a particular subject can conduct their own manual searches of ERIC materials, using procedures outlined in this booklet. Writers who want to save themselves time and effort (and who can talk their editors or news directors into spending $15 to $25) can have the ERIC materials searched by computer. This procedure is also described in this booklet.

Whether they choose to make their own search or have it made by computer, education writers gener-

How One Writer Uses ERIC

"I've used ERIC with great success," says one of the nation's top education writers, Cynthia Parsons of the *Christian Science Monitor.*

Ms. Parsons has used ERIC to provide both background information and the names of knowledgeable persons worth contacting. For example, when she edited a special issue on the education of American Indians, she turned to ERIC. "I didn't know a lot about the subject to begin with," said Ms. Parsons. "I needed to know the issues and what had been done for Indians going back a number of years." Not only did ERIC provide her with considerable information, Ms. Parsons said, but she was able to personally contact the authors of some of the ERIC materials. She invited some of them to write articles for the newspaper's special issue and interviewed others on the phone for her own articles.

As part of the *Monitor's* coverage of desegregation in Boston's public schools, Ms. Parsons wanted to offer readers a better perspective on the possible long-range effects of desegregation. ERIC was where she looked for copies of research reports that provided the necessary information.

The Boston Public Library is one of the 650 institutions that have access to ERIC materials. When writing a feature or column on an educational topic, Ms. Parsons said, she frequently scans the ERIC abstracts at the library for relevant materials, noting the names of authors of reports, papers, and articles. "When I see the same names popping up in a couple of different places," Ms. Parsons said, "I decide those persons are worth contacting as sources of information."

ally can obtain desired information in any of these three forms:

- abstracts (brief summaries) of materials
- full-size photocopies of materials
- microfiche of materials

This booklet explains how education writers can obtain and use abstracts, photocopies, and microfiche.

You Get What You Want By Giving ERIC What It Wants

Suppose a writer has decided or been assigned to do a series of articles or features on the decline of writing skills among today's youth.

Now what?

Of course, there's the local angle. How well do students in the area write? How do local schools teach writing? What do area school officials say?

But the local angle should be properly placed in the context of the national problem and the national search for solutions.

ERIC can help the writer (and readers or viewers) to see the local issue in proper perspective.

ERIC can help in two ways:

1. It can supply background information. The writer can read a few authoritative articles and papers that describe the decline, discuss reasons for it, and, perhaps, point to suggested or proven methods for dealing with the problem.

2. It can supply the names of knowledgeable—at least "reliable"—sources. The source might be a national authority who delivered a good speech at a convention of English teachers. Or it might be a university researcher who studied the problem at a number of schools and colleges. Then again, it might be a high school teacher who has had some success with a new approach to the teaching of writing.

Can ERIC help when news is breaking?

When a reporter is covering a breaking news story, there's no time to get and read copies of reports, articles, and speeches. But there may be time to scan some abstracts and pick out the names of a couple of persons who appear to know what they're talking or writing about. They can then be called to see if they have anything worth quoting in the breaking news story.

Don't beat the system; just know how it works

The ERIC system isn't all that complicated. But there are some things the writer needs to know how to do, especially if he or she is locating information or names without the aid of a computer.

The secret of getting what you want from the ERIC system is to give it what it wants. What the system wants most are the right descriptors. It's not going to help the writer, for example, to ask ERIC for "everything on writing." ERIC's idea of "everything on writing" may be a flood of citations of materials that include such exotics as "Attitudes of Indian Children as Revealed by the Analysis of the Free Writing Test."

Descriptors are words used to precisely describe the kinds of information desired.

Where do reporters find ERIC descriptors? They find them in the *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors.* The *Thesaurus* is available at the 16 clearinghouses and approximately 650 public institutions housing the ERIC collection. The newspaper or station that wants one for its own library can buy a copy for less than $10 from Macmillan Information, 216R Brown St., Riverside, NJ 08075.

Finding the right descriptors

The reporter working on the story about the decline in writing skills has a better chance of getting helpful information and leads if the right descriptors are used.

For example, the descriptors *Writing Skills* and *Secondary School Students* would control the flood considerably. Additional descriptors might be used to further direct the flow of citations of materials.

The user of the *Thesaurus* should know that BT stands for *broader term,* NT stands for *narrower term,* and RT stands for *related term.*

These terms are used in the *Thesaurus* as guides. Referring again to the study about the decline in writing skills, the reporter might check out the descriptor *Writing Skills,* and decide to be even more precise. Under *Writing Skills* (see Finding the Right Descriptors "step 1" on the next page) the reporter notices that *Composition Skills* is a narrower term (NT) and *Basic Skills* is a related term (RT).

Elsewhere in the *Thesaurus* (refer to "step 2" on next page) *Composition Skills* and *Basic Skills* are

listed as descriptors. The reporter may decide to use these two descriptors instead of *Writing Skills.* Of course, it is also possible to use all three in conjunction with *Secondary School Students.*

The experienced user of the ERIC system generally does use a combination of descriptors to search for the right citations. Combining descriptors improves the chances that the search will produce what is appropriate and exclude what is inappropriate.

It's nearly impossible, however, to get the perfect search, one in which the descriptors provide the user with 100 percent appropriate citations.

Finding the right descriptors

Step 1

WRITING SKILLS Jul. 1966

NT Composition Skills (Literary)
BT Language Skills
RT Basic Skills
Capitalization (Alphabetic)
Cloze Procedure
Descriptive Writing
Expository Writing
Language Styles
Literacy
Paragraph Composition
Playwriting
Punctuation
Stenography
Technical Writing
Writing
Writing Exercises

Writing Systems
Use WRITING

Written Expression
Use COMPOSITION (LITERARY)

Step 2

COMPOSITION SKILLS (LITERARY) Jul. 1966

BT Writing Skills
RT Capitalization (Alphabetic)
Composition (Literary)
Descriptive Writing
Expository Writing
Persuasive Discourse
Punctuation
Technical Writing

BASIC SKILLS Jul. 1966

UF Fundamental Skills (School)
BT Skills
RT Basic Vocabulary
Language Skills
Psychomotor Skills
Speech Skills
Study Skills
Verbal Ability
Writing Skills

Indexes Are Keys To Information

After choosing the proper descriptors, the education writer conducting a manual search is ready for the ERIC indexes. These are the keys to the citations and abstracts. One index is *Resources in Education* (RIE) and the other is *Current Index to Journals in Education* (CIJE). Both are published monthly and are available for examination at the clearinghouses and at hundreds of libraries and public agencies. Of course, the newspaper or station wishing to subscribe to the indexes can do so.

- RIE is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. As of July 1, 1977, an annual subscription was $42.70.
- CIJE is available from Macmillan Information, 216R Brown St., Riverside, NJ 08075. As of July 1, 1977, an annual subscription was $62.

How to use the indexes

RIE and CIJE do not index the same things and are not used in exactly the same way. However, both can lead the education writer to helpful information and the names of possible news sources.

- **RIE**—This indexes such documents as research reports, project summaries, and papers delivered at conferences and workshops. RIE does not index articles appearing in education journals.

The subject index of RIE lists all the major descriptors and indicates the citations to which they apply. Suppose that reporter is still working on the story about the decline in writing skills, and after consulting the *Thesaurus,* has decided to look up citations under the descriptors *Composition Skills* and *Writing Skills.* (If the reporter will have the search conducted by computer, other descriptors might be added, but more on that later.)

A number of citations will be found under both *Composition Skills* and *Writing Skills.* A part of one of these reads as follows:

ED1277814 FL007963
Misrepresentation of Linguistics in the Media
Riley, William K.
Publ. Date: May 76; 29 pp; paper presented at the Perspectives on Language Conference, University of Louisville, KY, May 6-8, 1976.
EDRS Price: MF—$0.83 plus postage; HC not available from EDRS.

The first thing the reporter has to decide is whether the citation sounds sufficiently interesting to go to the next step, which is looking at the detailed citations containing abstracts listed in the document resume section in RIE. Some persons trying to find reasons for the "writing crisis" in the United States have pointed to the emphasis on linguistics as one of the culprits. The impact of linguistics, for example, was discussed in Merrill Shiels' prize-winning article in *Newsweek*, "Why Johnny Can't Write." Given this background (or just general curiosity), the reporter decides to follow up on the citation.

Also of immediate interest to the reporter is the **ERIC Document (ED) Number** given for the citation and the cost of microfiche (MF) and hard copies (HC), if ordered. Hard copies are photocopies of the original material. **EDRS** is the ERIC Document Reproduction Service.

The **ED Number** for this citation is ED1277814. In the document section of RIE, detailed citations containing abstracts are arranged by **ED Number.**

After finding the **ED Number** and reading the detailed citation and the abstract (about 200 words), the reporter may decide either to look at a microfiche copy of the paper or contact Mr. Riley, or both.

The microfiche can be seen without charge at any of the clearinghouses or 650 public institutions. If the reporter has access to a microfiche reader at the newspaper office, the microfiche can be ordered through EDRS. Hard copies, when available, can generally be obtained only through EDRS. They cannot be obtained at the clearinghouses or public institutions.

If the reporter wants to contact Mr. Riley directly, the place to start, of course, is the University of Louisville. Mr. Riley may be located elsewhere, but the University, which hosted the May 1976 conference, should know where he can be found.

• **CIJE**—This is the index to articles appearing in approximately 700 periodicals. More than 20,000 articles are indexed each year.

One of the important differences between the articles indexed by CIJE and the papers and reports indexed by RIE is that the articles can be found only in the publications themselves. ERIC does not provide either microfiche or photocopies of the articles.

As in the case of RIE, citations are listed under descriptors. Each citation has an **ERIC Journal (EJ) Number.** A detailed citation with a brief description of the article can then be found in another section of the index under the appropriate **EJ Number.** Among the citations under the descriptor *Writing Skills*, the reporter would find this one:

EJ142723 CG510702
A Plea for English
Dudley, David A.
Journal of National Association of College Admissions Counselors; v 21, n 1; pp 3-6; Jul 76

Again, the reporter can read the article, contact the author, or do both. Copies of most of the periodicals indexed by CIJE are kept on file by the libraries and other institutions housing the ERIC collection.

Incidentally, the number opposite the **ED Number** or **EJ Number** in each citation refers to the clearinghouse that placed the citation into the index (see the list of clearinghouses on page 7).

Computer Search Saves Writer Time

The process just described—where the education writer personally selects descriptors and hunts through the indexes—isn't difficult. However, it does take time. And sometimes, the writer doesn't have the time.

A computer search is much faster. Moreover, a trained information analyst can usually make a more precise and rewarding computerized search. The writer making a manual search can spend a lot of time just checking citations under one or two descriptors, and many of the materials cited may prove to be inappropriate. By using more descriptors, and selecting them more expertly, the searcher can zero in on more appropriate citations.

For example, the reporter searching manually for information on the decline in writing skills used the two descriptors *Composition Skills* and *Writing Skills.* But the reporter might be interested mainly in evidence of the decline and what's being done about it at the high school or college level. The searcher can easily add the descriptors *Senior High Schools* or *Higher Education* as a means of selecting only those citations under *Composition Skills* and *Writing Skills* that are appropriate.

Getting down to specifics

The writer working on a story about a particular aspect of testing could be deluged with inappropriate citations by simply using the single descriptor *Testing.* The information analyst can find out exactly what the writer is looking for, and then select the best descriptors.

The writer can initiate the computer search over the phone, but there are two good reasons for going to the computer terminal center in person when possible.

1. By working closely with the reference assistant, the writer can help make sure that the descriptors that will produce the most helpful citations are selected.

2. The writer can immediately examine the printout of citations and abstracts and decide on the spot what microfiche, photocopies, or journals should be requested, or what potential news sources should be contacted.

If the computer search is requested by telephone, the printout will be mailed in a day or two.

Some clearinghouses can provide computer searches initiated in person or by telephone. However, not all of the 650 public institutions have computer terminals. A complete list of computer terminal locations is available from any clearinghouse or from the User Services Coordinator, ERIC Processing and Reference Facility, 4833 Rugby Ave., Suite 303, Bethesda, MD 20014.

As previously mentioned, the typical computer search costs between $15 and $25. It's worth it.

Clearinghouses

Each of the 16 ERIC clearinghouses collects materials on a particular subject in education.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Career Education (CE)
Ohio State University
Center for Vocational Education
1960 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210
Telephone: (614) 486-3655

ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services (CG)
University of Michigan
School of Education Building, Room 2108
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
Telephone: (313) 764-9492.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (CS)
National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801
Telephone: (217) 328-3870

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management (EA)
Library (South Wing), University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403
Telephone: (503) 686-5043

ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children (EC)
CEC Information Center
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091
Telephone: (703) 620-3660

ERIC Clearinghouse on Language and Linguistics (FL)
Center for Applied Linguistics
1611 N. Kent St., Arlington, VA 22209
Telephone: (703) 528-4312

ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education (HE)
George Washington University
1 Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: (202) 296-2597

ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources (IR)
Syracuse University, School of Education
Syracuse, NY 13210
Telephone: (315) 423-3640

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges (JC)
University of California at Los Angeles
96 Powell Library, Los Angeles, CA 90024
Telephone: (213) 825-3931

ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education (PS)
University of Illinois, College of Education
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., Urbana, IL 61801
Telephone: (217) 333-1386

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (RC)
New Mexico State University
Box 3AP, Las Cruces, NM 88003
Telephone: (505) 646-2623

ERIC Clearinghouse for Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Education (SE)
Ohio State University
1200 Chambers Road, Third Floor,
Columbus, OH 43212
Telephone: (614) 422-6717

ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/ Social Sciences Education (SO)
Social Science Education Consortium, Inc.
855 Broadway, Boulder, CO 80302
Telephone: (303) 492-8434

ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education (SP)
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
1 Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: (202) 293-7280.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation (TM)
Educational Testing Service
Rosedale Road, Princeton, NJ 08540
Telephone: (609) 921-9000 (Ext. 2182)

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education (UD)
Teachers College, Box 40
Columbia University, 525 W. 120th St.,
New York, NY 10027
Telephone: (212) 678-3782